

# *Dateline DHMH*

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

## *A Message from the Secretary*

We are in the midst of one the hotter summers in recent years and it has taken its toll on human life. As of late July, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner had reported 29 heat-related deaths, the most since we started specifically tracking this statistic in 1999.

Most of you know how important it is to take precautions in summer's heat, but a reminder never hurts. Here are some tips:

- Be aware that alcohol and medications can impede one's ability to perspire, a natural cooling mechanism for the body.
- Drink plenty of fluids such as water or fruit juices to avoid dehydration.
- Wear sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses. Attempt to stay in shaded areas.
- Don't over-exert when working outdoors. Take short breaks if fatigued.
- Wear light-colored, light-weight and loose-fitting clothing.
- Check on the elderly and young children frequently.
- NEVER leave children or pets in a car, even with the windows slightly opened.

Of the 29 reported deaths, only one was a homeless person. Of the 28 who were not homeless,

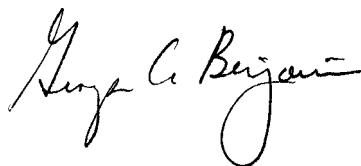
17 of the victims were 65 years of age or older. All were classified as accidents due to high exposure to environmental heat. Many had contributing health factors.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of checking on your elderly relatives, friends and neighbors. You never know when they may be in distress.

And remember, never leave a child or pet unattended in a car. Unfortunately this year, there have already been reports of children dying from this practice in other parts of the country. If you see a child or pet left unattended in a car, please notify the authorities immediately. It may save a life.

Additional heat-related illness information is available on the DHMH Web site by going to the home page ([www.dhmh.state.md.us](http://www.dhmh.state.md.us)) and clicking on the 'Public Health Alert Heat Advisory,' located just above the 'Hot Issues.' Or, you can phone the DHMH Hot Topics Line at 1-866-866-2709 and listen for the heat-related illness prompt.

As always, my wish is for you to be safe and enjoy the rest of your summer.



## **DHMH Receives \$1 Million Federal Grant**

A one-year, \$1.23 million grant to examine Maryland's uninsured population and employer-based insurance market has been awarded to DHMH by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). This State Planning Grant will also enable the Department to analyze alternative models to make comprehensive health insurance coverage accessible to uninsured Marylanders.

In collaboration with the Maryland Health Care Commission and researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, DHMH's Office of Health Care Financing will research, identify and define characteristics of the State's uninsured and key factors that affect Maryland businesses' decisions to offer, and employees' decisions to accept, health insurance. Additionally, DHMH will carry out a comprehensive assessment of the costs associated with covering the uninsured.

"This grant will allow us to build on Maryland's existing successes," said Deputy Secretary for Health Care Financing Debbie Chang. "In particular, it will allow us to explore expansion to existing private/public sector collaborations such as the

## DHMH Receives Federal Grant *Continued*

Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) Premium and Employer Sponsored Insurance (ESI) programs."

The MCHP Premium and ESI programs cover children in families with incomes between 200 and 300 percent of the federal poverty level. In exchange, parents pay a monthly premium to the State of \$40 or \$50, depending on income.

Maryland has a strong track record of expanding health insurance coverage and in designing effective, comprehensive programs to reduce gaps in coverage for the uninsured. Currently, the State has the fifteenth-lowest uninsured rate in the country for those under age 65. While employer-based and public insurance coverages are more widely available in Maryland than in the majority of states, many residents lack coverage.

"By better understanding why some businesses decide not to offer coverage, and workers' decisions to decline available coverage, we may be able to design options to change these practices," said Barbara G. McLean, Executive Director of the Maryland Health Care Commission. "This, in turn, would ultimately lead to a reduction in the number of uninsured Marylanders."

Maryland was one of 12 states to be awarded a HRSA State Planning Grant.

## Calendar of Events

Thursday, September 12 — **Maryland Charity Campaign Kickoff.** O'Connor Building lobby, 11 a.m.

Tuesday, September 17 — **Workshop: Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART Recovery): An Addictions Treatment Alternative;** University of Maryland School of Nursing Baltimore; 8:30 a.m. — 4:15 p.m. \$120, approved for Category I and Category A continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information or visit the school's Web site at [www.ssw.umaryland.edu](http://www.ssw.umaryland.edu) for a full workshop description.

Thursday, September 19 — **Workshop: Elder Law Issues: Asset Management, Health Care Decision Making, and Paying for Long-Term Care;** University of Maryland School of Nursing Baltimore; 8:30 a.m. — 4:15 p.m. \$120, approved for Category I and Category A continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information or visit the school's Web site at [www.ssw.umaryland.edu](http://www.ssw.umaryland.edu) for a full workshop description.

Tuesday, September 24 — **Take Your Loved One to the Doctor Day,** part of a campaign to bring the best health information to African American communities and help African American consumers take charge of their health. Phone Ginny Seyler on 410-767-6513 or Michael Carter on 410-767-6600 for more information.

Friday, September 27 — **Workshop: Dual Diagnosis: Assessment and Treatment;** University of Maryland School of Nursing Baltimore; 8:30 a.m. — 4:15 p.m. \$120, approved for Category I and Category A continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information or visit the school's Web site at [www.ssw.umaryland.edu](http://www.ssw.umaryland.edu) for a full workshop description.

Tuesday and Wednesday, October 1 - 2 — **Blood Drive.** O'Connor Building lobby, 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Call Althea Gibson at 410-767-6403 for more information or to schedule an appointment.



*Certificates of Appreciation from the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism were presented to all organizations and individuals attending the annual Volunteer Luncheon at Springfield Hospital Center. Mrs. Leona Blumenfeld (center), a faithful volunteer for many years, is presented with her certificate by Jon Seeman, Deputy Secretary for Operations (left) and Fred Hitchcock, DHMH Director of Volunteer Services (right). For more information about volunteering or donation needs, contact Springfield Hospital Center's Volunteer Services Office at 410-795-2100 x 3218.*

## Transplant Games

Tracey Serpi's father didn't accompany her to Florida for the 2002 United States Transplant Games, but a part of him was with her. That part was a kidney — one he donated ten years ago to his daughter, who has suffered from polycystic kidney disease since birth.



For Tracey, an epidemiologist for the Office of Injury Prevention, the end result of the U. S. Transplant Games was a bronze medal in bowling and a chance to promote a cause that has saved her life.

"It was a great experience," she said, "I'm definitely going back."

The Games, held June 26-29 in Orlando, Florida, are an Olympic-style athletic competition, presented biennially by the National Kidney Foundation since 1990. The event is open to individuals of all ages who have received a life-saving organ transplant such as a heart, lung, liver, kidney, pancreas or bone marrow. It features 37 events in more than a dozen sports, including swimming, cycling, basketball, track and field, golf, bowling and tennis.

Participants came from each of the 50 states. Tracey was one of 16 transplant recipients on Team Maryland.

She participated in both the single and team bowling events in her age category, bringing home the bronze medal in singles. Despite her success, Tracey doesn't consider herself a natural bowler. "Next time I may try some different events," she said, "Swimming seemed like fun. Or maybe the 5-K walk."

Tracey's husband, Bill, also a DHMH employee, encourages her athletic endeavors, and has been a constant source of support throughout the course of her sometimes difficult illness.

"In the past two years, I've had to undergo several surgeries, including the removal of my own kidneys and then my gallbladder," Tracey explained. "I have to take immunosuppressant medications to ensure that my body doesn't reject my donor kidney," she said. "I also have to take care to avoid exposure to illnesses like colds and flu, since those kinds of illnesses affect me more severely due to my medication."

In addition to the athletes and their families, many families of organ donors rounded out the crowd at the Transplant Games. A special ceremony was held to honor the memory of donors who, despite the loss of their own lives, made it possible for others' lives to continue.

While the Games call attention to the success of organ and tissue transplantation, they are also a celebration of life among the recipients, their families and friends. Tracey feels strongly that encouraging

people to become donors is the central message of the Games.

"We all have the ability to save lives," she said. "Nothing is more important than that."

To become an organ and tissue donor, simply sign and carry a donor card in your wallet, or indicated 'yes' to organ donation on your Maryland driver's license. Be sure to tell your family about your decision. For more information about becoming a donor, call the Transplant Resource Center of Maryland at 800-641-HERO (4376).

*Editor's Note: Thanks to Tara Snyder, Community Health Educator in the Center of Health Promotion, Education and Tobacco Prevention, for writing this article.*

## Vision Objectives

Social & Health Services, Ltd., on behalf on the National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health, has announced a **Healthy Vision 2010 Community Awards Program**. This initiative will provide funding for community-based education and health promotion projects that address the vision objectives in Healthy People 2010.

Each award is worth up to \$10,000 per year. Applications must be postmarked by August 30; awards will be announced on October 1.

Applications and information are available at [www.healthyvision2010.org/funding](http://www.healthyvision2010.org/funding) or by contacting Renee Primack at Social & Health Services at 301-770-5800 x 5496 or by e-mail at [rprimack@shs.net](mailto:rprimack@shs.net).

## Stairwells and Art

The next time you are in the 301 Building, you are in for a visual treat if you use the East stairwell. Beginning in May, murals painted by State employees from five different agencies began appearing on the stairwell walls.

Part of a StairWELL Project, the murals are designed to encourage people to use the stairwells and get physically fit. This pilot project is modeled after a similar initiative at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

The project is a collaborative effort among DHMH, and the Departments of Personnel, General Services (DGS) and Budget and Management (DBM). The idea came from DGS Secretary Peta Richkus, who saw a televised report on the CDC project.

Staff from the DHMH Division of Cardiovascular Health and Nutrition conducted a survey of State employees at the State Office Complex to determine why people use either the elevators or stairs. Nearly two-thirds of the 54 percent who use the elevators said the stairs were too long; even more felt they were too lonely, boring or dirty.

Division staff also presented stairwell prompts and improvement research to a work group established to implement the project.

The goal of the project is to encourage people to use steps and ultimately increase the physical activity of state workers. There are many health benefits to increased physical activity, including lowering blood pressure, maintaining healthy weight, and lowering blood sugar.

DGS has completed a 'rainbow' mural between the mezzanine and second floor. DBM is working on a waterfall, the Department of Aging is painting a quilt, the Office of Planning is working on a Baltimore skyline, and the Governor's Office of Children, Youth and Families is painting Maryland symbols.



Future plans include improvements to the West stairwell of the 301 Building and painting the floors on the landings without murals. If this pilot project is a success, the project may be conducted in other State office buildings.

For more information, contact Libby Lewandowski at 410-767-4945 or Patrick McCracken at 410-767-5483 or by e-mail at [mccrackenp@dhmh.state.md.us](mailto:mccrackenp@dhmh.state.md.us).



***Editor's Note:** Thanks to the staff in the Family Health Administration's Division of Cardiovascular Health and Nutrition for contributing to this article.*



STATE OF MARYLAND

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*A publication of the Maryland  
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Hygiene, Office of Public Relations*

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